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ABSTRACT

Reports and commentary in the media concerning the use of psychological tests in educational, clinical, and business/industrial contexts have become commonplace in recent years. The Gallup polls over the past 15 years indicate that the American people as a whole are in favor of requiring all students to pass a high school graduation examination, promoting children only if they can pass yearly examinations, requiring new teachers to pass a state board examination, and testing teachers and administrators periodically. In the mid-1970s, a Russell Sage Foundation survey of 1450 teachers found that the tests administered, the purposes for which they were employed, and the attitudes of teachers toward testing varied from school to school. A 1982 survey of 457 students at Pepperdine University (California) indicated that college students' attitudes toward oral testing are not very positive. A 1983 survey of students at Pepperdine, the University of North Alabama, and Guiford College (North Carolina) found that most students feel that standardized tests of ability are not good measures of their ability to do college work, are ambiguous and tricky, emphasize memory for detail and make them nervous and upset. Test results and the 1983 attitude questionnaire are included. (BW)

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ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES CONCERNING PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL TESTING

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Attitudes and Experiences Concerning Psychological and Educational Testing

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Reports and commentary in the media concerning the use of psychological tests in educational, clinical, and business/industrial contexts have become commonplace in recent years. Newspapers and popular magazines contain many stories and discussions reflecting attitudes and practices pertaining to testing. Articles concerned with the characteristics and shortcomings of college admissions tests, instruments which have significant effects on the lives of millions of young people and their parents, are especially plentiful. Minimum competency testing for students and proficiency testing for teachers have also received substantial attention in the media.

Gallup Polls on Educational Testing

Reflective of the popular interest in testing are the results of a series of Gallup opinion polls (Gallup, 1978, 1979, 1983) on educational issues. Several polls have included questions concerning such matters as the decline in national test scores and minimum competency testing of both students and teachers. The findings of these polls over the past 15 years indicate that the American people as a whole are in favor of (see Table (1):

1. Requiring all high school students in the United States to pass a standard nationwide examination in order to obtain a high school diploma (65% in 1976) (Elam, 1978). In the 1978 poll, 37% of the respondents indicated that such tests should be prepared on a local basis, 25% on a state basis, and 28% on a national basis.

2. Giving national tests to students in the local schools so their educational achievement can be compared with that of students in other communities (70% in 1971, Elam, 1978; 75% in 1983, Gallup, 1983).

3. Promoting children from grade to grade only if they can pass examinations (75%) (Gallup, 1983).

4. Requiring teachers to pass a state board examination before they are hired to prove their knowledge in the subject(s) will teach (85%) (Gallup, 1979).

5. Testing teachers every few years after they are hired to see if they are keeping up-to-date with developments in their fields (85%) (Gallup, 1979).

6. Testing school administrators every few years to see if they are keeping up-to-date (85%) (Gallup, 1979).

Concerning the annual decline in college admissions test scores (see Figure 1), 65% of the sample questioned in the 1976 Gallup poll indicated that the decline was simply a reflection of the decreasing quality of education in the United States. The percentages of respondents endorsing various reasons for the decline varied with whether the poll question was open-ended or fixed-alternative. Responding to an open-ended question in the 1975 poll regarding the reasons for test-score declines, 29% of those answering listed "students' lack of interest/motivation," 28% listed "lack of discipline in the home and school," 22% listed "poor curriculum--too easy, not enough emphasis on basics," and 21% listed "inadequate or uninterested teachers." Responding to a fixed-alternative question in the 1976 poll concerning which of a list of reasons are most responsible for the decline in national test scores, the following five reasons were endorsed as most important (see Table 1):

Less parental attention, concern, and supervision of the child. (65%)

Students aren't as motivated to do well. (52%)

Too much television viewing. (49%)

Society is becoming too permissive. (49%)

Teachers are giving less attention to students. (39%)

Most of the items on this list have also been offered as reasons for many other problems experienced by the public schools.

Attitudes of Teachers and Administrators

Although the Gallup polls involved the most representative samples of the nation as a whole, attitudes and opinions concerning issues such as minimum competency testing have also been assessed in several doctoral research projects (e.g., Horn, 1981; Johnson, 1981; B. P. Steele, 1981; Walters, 1981). The findings reported in these dissertations lend further support to the notion that the public as a whole supports competency testing of students as basically a good idea. On the other hand, certain professional organizations and teacher unions are less supportive of teacher competency tests. These groups view current tests, and multiple-choice tests in particular, as unfair and untrustworthy measures of teacher competencies. Such negative feelings are undoubtedly influenced by a lack of understanding of both the values and limitations of tests, a shortcoming which has contributed to crippling legislation against testing in certain states (Lambert, 1980-81).

Some years ago, the Russell Sage Foundation (Goslin, 1976) administered a questionnaire concerning tests and testing to a quota sample of 1450 teachers in U. S. public school; teachers in a number of private and parochial secondary schools and a few elementary schools also completed the questionnaire. Not unex-

pectedly, it was found that the tests administered, the purposes for which they were employed, and the attitudes of teachers toward testing varied from school to school. Although no recent survey equal in scope to that of the Russell Sage Foundation has been conducted, a study by Educational Testing Service completed during the late 1970's provided some data concerning the perceptions by educational administrators and other school-connected officials of teachers' attitudes and practices with respect to testing (Lambert, 1980-81). Despite their limitations, surveys of educational testing have involved much larger samples and more systematic efforts than research on attitudes toward psychological or clinical psychological testing (see J. R. Steele, 1981).

Survey of Oral Testing

Earlier surveys supplied information of a general nature concerned with what students think about tests and testing, but updated information on attitudes and experiences concerning tests would be useful. To provide more details on the attitudes and experiences of college students at one university with respect to tests, and oral tests in particular, a 21-item questionnaire was administered to a sample of 457 students--approximately 25% of the student body at Seaver College of Pepperdine University in 1982. Among the findings of interest in this context are the facts that (see Table 2):

1. 64% of the students said that tests in college courses should not be timed, or at least the time limits should not be adhered to rigorously.
2. 70% said that tests in college courses should be given every week or every two weeks.
3. 78% said that tests should contain optional questions that students can answer for extra credit.

4. 61% said that students should attempt all questions on a test and not be permitted to omit questions without penalty.

5. 64% preferred objective to essay tests.

6. 34% said they would study more for essay tests, and 18% said they would study more for objective tests.

7. 93% said they would rather have the questions on a test presented in writing rather than orally.

8. 85% said they preferred to write out their answers to test questions rather than responding orally to an examiner.

9. 66% said they would do better on an oral test if they were questioned by one professor rather than two or more professors, one or more fellow students, or by a combination of professors and students.

10. 55% said that tests on which questions are either presented orally or answered orally should be used more often in college.

Additional findings of interest from this survey are:

1. A greater percentage of upperclassmen than lowerclassmen preferred essay to objective tests.

2. Although students at all class levels stated that they would study more for essay than for objective tests, this was especially true of seniors.

3. A greater percentage of girls than boys indicated a preference for test questions presented in writing rather than orally.

4. A greater percentage of girls than boys stated that they would prefer to answer test questions in writing rather than orally.

5. Upperclassmen objected less than lowerclassmen to oral tests.

Experience has shown that, when carefully planned, administered, and evaluated, oral achievement tests provide fairly reliable assessments of abilities and skills, many of which are not adequately tapped by written objective or essay examinations. The

results of this survey indicate, however, that college students' attitudes toward oral tests are not very positive. Consequently, teachers who use oral tests must not only exercise care in preparing the test; they must also prepare the examinees--both cognitively and affectively--for taking the test.

Twenty-Question Survey on Testing

To provide additional survey information on attitudes toward psychological and educational testing, in 1983 random samples of 125 undergraduate students at Pepperdine University, 51 undergraduate students at the University of North Alabama, and 65 undergraduate students at Guilford College (North Carolina) were administered a 20-item, multiple-choice questionnaire concerning their experiences with tests and their attitudes toward them. Responses to the questions were tabulated and compared with selected demographic variables and replies to other questions. The complete questionnaire and the number in each of the three student groups endorsing each response are given in Table 3 (see Table 3).

With respect to their attitudes toward standardized tests, it is noteworthy that nearly two-thirds of those questioned felt that standardized tests of ability, such as the SAT, were not good measures of their ability to do college work. Furthermore, over four-fifths of the students felt that standardized test questions are ambiguous and tricky, emphasize memory for detail, and are guessing games. Over three-fourths agreed that standardized tests make them so nervous and upset that they are unable to concentrate and do well. Although less than 7% of the students thought that standardized tests had influenced their lives a

great deal, almost 50% admitted that such tests had influenced them to some extent. Only 6% of the sample viewed standardized tests as almost always helpful, but nearly 45% considered them to be usually helpful and 38% as occasionally helpful. Those who reported having taken standardized tests of achievement or intelligence were fairly evenly divided on whether the test results were accurate, but a majority of those who had taken a personality inventory concluded that the results accurately described them. Thus, although the students as a group were somewhat negative in their attitudes and reported experiences with standardized tests, there were pronounced differences among both students and tests in this regard.

Contingency analysis of the relationships among selected demographic variables and other items on the questionnaire revealed that, compared with freshmen and sophomores, juniors and seniors were more likely to state that standardized tests of achievement and/or intelligence did not reflect their true abilities and that the tests were not very helpful in planning their courses and other aspects of their lives. Females were more likely than males to say that the SAT and other standardized ability tests are poor measures of their ability to do college work. Among those students who had taken a personality inventory, females were more likely than males to say that the results accurately described their personalities.

It is recognized that these results, based as they are on relatively small, and perhaps unrepresentative, samples, are not generalizable to all college students and contexts. However, the

surveys do represent sound pilot studies for a more extensive investigation of college students' attitudes toward testing which is now underway. In addition, it is hoped that the results are sufficiently interesting to encourage other researchers to conduct their own surveys and share the findings with us.

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Table 1

Selected Results of Gallup Polls on Educational Testing

The findings of these polls over the past 15 years indicate that the nation (United States) on the whole is in favor of:

1. Requiring all high school students to pass a standard nationwide examination in order to obtain a high school diploma (50% in 1958, 65% in 1976) (Elam, 1978). In the 1978 poll, 37% of the respondents indicated that such tests should be prepared on a local basis, 25% on a state basis, and 23% on a national basis.

2. Giving national tests to students in the local schools so their educational achievements can be compared with that of students in other communities (75%) (Gallup, 1983).

3. Promoting children from grade to grade only if they can pass examinations (75%) (Gallup, 1983).

4. Requiring teachers to pass a state board examination before they are hired to prove their knowledge in the subject(s) they will teach (Gallup, 1979).

5. Testing teachers every few years after they are hired to see if they are keeping up-to-date with developments in their fields (85%) (Gallup, 1979).

6. Testing school administrators every few years to see if they are keeping up-to-date (Gallup, 1979).

The following five reasons were endorsed as most important in the decline in national test scores:

1. Less parental attention, concern, and supervision of the child (65%).

2. Students aren't as motivated to do well (52%).

3. Too much television viewing (49%).

4. Society is becoming too permissive (49%).

5. Teachers are giving less attention to students (39%).

Table 2

Results of 1982 Survey of Testing Practices and Preferences

1. 64% of the students said that tests in college courses should not be timed, or at least the time limits should not be adhered to rigorously.

2. 70% said that tests in college courses should be given every week or every two weeks.

3. 78% said that tests should contain optional questions that students can answer for extra credit.

4. 61% said that students should attempt all questions on a test and not be permitted to omit questions without penalty,

5. 64% preferred objective to essay tests.

6. 34% said they would study more for essay tests, and 18% said they would study more for objective tests.

7. 93% said they would rather have the questions on a test presented in writing rather than orally.

8. 85% said they preferred to write out their answers to test questions rather than giving them orally to an examiner.

9. 66% said they would do better on an oral test if they were questioned by one professor rather than two or more professors, one or more fellow students, or by a combination of professors and students.

10. 55% said that tests on which questions are either presented orally or answered orally should be used more often in college.

Additional findings of interest from this survey:

1. A greater percentage of upperclassmen than lowerclassmen preferred essay to objective tests.

2. Although students at all class levels stated that they would study more for essay than for objective tests, this was especially true of seniors.

3. A greater percentage of girls than boys indicated a preference for test questions presented in writing rather than orally.

4. A greater percentage of girls than boys stated that they would prefer to answer test questions presented in writing rather than orally.

5. Upperclassmen objected less than lowerclassmen to oral tests.

Table 3

Twenty Questions on Testing Questionnaire

Directions: As part of a research project being conducted at this institution, I should like to ask you about your attitudes and experiences concerning standardized testing. The questionnaire is anonymous, and your answers will not affect your grade in this course or your college career in any way. Please answer every question to the best of your ability by drawing a circle around the corresponding letter. Do not write your name on the questionnaire, but feel free to make comments at the end. Thank you for your cooperation.

%	
	1. Do you feel that standardized tests of ability such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) are good measures of your ability to do college work?
19.1	A. Yes
64.7	B. No
16.2	C. Uncertain
	2. If your answer to question 1 was "No," why don't you feel that standardized tests are good measures of your ability to do college work?
75.5	A. Standardized tests make you so nervous and upset that you can't concentrate and do well.
81.7	B. Standardized test questions are ambiguous and tricky.
92.9	C. Standardized tests emphasize memory for details, and you're not a good memorizer.
90.0	D. Standardized tests are "guessing games," and you're not a good guesser.
71.4	E. Other reason(s) (please list):
	3. Whether or not you feel that standardized tests are good measures of your ability, how high do you feel that your scholastic ability is in comparison with the abilities of other students?
14.5	A. You're in the top 5%.
43.2	B. You're in the top 25%,
31.1	C. You're in the middle 50%.
2.5	D. You're in the bottom 25%.
.8	E. You're in the bottom 5%.
7.1	F. You have no idea where you stand.
	4. In general, how well do you score on objective tests (multiple-choice, true-false, etc.) in comparison with written tests?
27.4	A. You score better on objective tests.
35.3	B. You score better on essay tests.
32.8	C. You score about the same on objective and essay tests.
4.6	D. You don't know.

5. Have you taken one or more standardized tests of achievement in school subjects since you started going to school?

85.5 A. Yes
12.0 B. No
2.1 C. Uncertain

6. If your answer to question 5 was "Yes," did your score(s) on the achievement test(s) accurately reflect your knowledge of the subject(s)?

28.6 A. Yes
36.5 B. No
19.5 C. Uncertain

7. Have you ever taken a standardized intelligence test, either individually or in a group of people?

16.2 A. You have taken an individually-administered intelligence test.
22.8 B. You have taken a group-administered intelligence test.
14.9 C. You have taken both individually- and group-administered intelligence tests.
27.8 D. You have taken neither individually- nor group-administered intelligence tests.
16.2 E. You don't know.

8. If your answer to question 7 was A, B, or C, did the results of the test(s) accurately reflect your intelligence?

17.0 A. Yes
15.8 B. No
24.1 C. Uncertain

9. If you have taken one or more intelligence tests, in which of the following IQ ranges did your score(s) fall?

.4 A. Below 70
.8 B. 70-84
1.7 C. 85-99
10.4 D. 100-114
13.7 E. 115-129
13.3 F. 130-144
2.1 G. 145-159
2.9 H. Above 159

10. To what extent do you believe that a person's intelligence is inborn (genetically determined) rather than acquired (developed by experience)?

2.5 A. You believe that intelligence is completely inborn.
36.1 B. You believe that intelligence is mostly inborn, but to some extent it can be acquired by experience.
55.6 C. You believe that intellligence is to some extent inborn, but it's mostly acquired by experience.
5.0 D. You believe that intelligence is completely acquired.

11. Have you ever taken a vocational interest inventory?

43.6 A. Yes
44.4 B. No
11.2 C. Uncertain

12. If your answer to question 11 was "Yes," did the results of the inventory accurately describe your vocational interests?

24.5 A. Yes
17.8 B. No
5.4 C. Uncertain

13. Have you ever taken a personality inventory or any other kind of personality test?

41.1 A. Yes
51.0 B. No
7.5 C. Uncertain

14. If your answer to question 13 was "Yes," did the results of the personality inventory or test accurately describe your personality?

22.8 A. Yes
9.1 B. No
12.4 C. Uncertain

15. In general, to what extent have your scores on standardized tests of achievement, intelligence, interest, or personality affected your life?

6.6 A. A great deal
46.9 B. To some extent, but not a great deal
42.3 C. Not at all

16. In general, do you feel that standardized tests are a help or hindrance to students in planning their courses and other aspects of their lives?

6.2 A. Almost always helpful
44.4 B. Usually helpful, but occasionally a hindrance
37.8 C. Occasionally helpful, but usually a hindrance
5.8 D. Almost always a hindrance

17. What is your college classification?

17.4 A. Freshman
30.7 B. Sophomore
28.2 C. Junior
20.7 D. Senior

18. What is your sex?

37.8 A. Male
62.2 B. Female

19. What is your major field of study at this institution?

17.4	A. Business
14.5	B. Education
8.3	C. English or Foreign Languages
17.4	D. Art or Music
30.7	E. Social Sciences (Economics, Political Science, Psychology, etc.)
10.4	F. Other (please indicate)

20. In which of the following ranges does your overall college grade-point average fall?

12.9	A. 3.50-4.00
33.6	B. 3.00-3.49
29.0	C. 2.50-2.99
15.4	D. 2.00-2.49
2.9	E. 1.50-1.99
6.2	F. Below 1.50

Comments: Please make any comments which you wish concerning standardized tests on the back of this sheet.

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*Percent of respondents to this item selecting the designated option.

Figure 1

Scholastic Aptitude Test Scores by Year